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CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION



THE TRADITIONS OF RUSSIAN AND EUROPEAN PERCEPTION OF THE STATE FRONTIER IN THE CONDITIONS OF TRANSBORDER REGIONAL COOPERATION

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The article focuses on the state frontier in European and Russian political cultures as a major instrument for developing trans-border regional cooperation. The term 'state frontier' is defined through a prism of regional integration processes. The authors examine the role of trans-border relations between Russia and the European Union in promoting mutually beneficial strategic cooperation in the Baltic Sea region.

Historical experience, geopolitical position, national psychology and some other factors shape common perceptions of the state frontier in mass consciousness, which can vary from country to country. The state frontier is a key imperative of trans-border regional cooperation. The trans-border relations between Russia and the EU serve a foundation for the development of strategic partnership, and it is cross-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea region that proves to be most efficient in this respect. At present, there are several cooperation mechanisms and programmes in place which are aimed at enhancing Russia — EU relations in the Baltic Sea region. In the long-term perspective, the development of regional integration processes in the Baltic Sea region is seen as one of the key elements for increasing and strengthening strategic cooperation between Russia and the EU.

Key words: political culture, state frontier, trans-border cooperation, regional integration processes

Political culture is a vital element of any political system or public body. It reflects the processes of interaction among people in the sphere of sociopolitical relations. Stereotypes and attitudes of a certain political culture have a significant impact on formation of perceptions and ideas of major notions and realities of international relations, with the notion of a state frontier being one of them.

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A frontier is defined as a line or border separating two countries. It marks an area that has national sovereignty. "A frontier between two states has always been a cause for disputes, conflicts and wars. The nature of this notion seems to inherently bear an international conflict, as it originated from disputes, conflicts and wars over a territory between peoples" [6].

Compared to other types of international conflicts, it is an international conflict over spatial and territorial issues that is most long-running and hard to resolve. There are many examples in human history to illustrate this point. Thus, the Reconquista was an eight-century-long period in the Middle Ages, in which several Christian kingdoms succeeded in re-conquering the Iberian Peninsula from the Islamic kingdoms (the Arabs and the Berbers (later the Moors)). It lasted since 718 up to 1492. Moreover, many frontier disputes are still unresolved: the ongoing dispute over Gibraltar between Great Britain and Spain which started in 1704; a dispute over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands (*Islas Malvinas* in Spanish) between Argentina and the United Kingdom; disputes between Greece and Turkey; the conflict in Northern Ireland; territorial disputes among the states of the former Yugoslavia; India-Pakistan border conflicts and others.

Therefore, the territorial factor plays a significant role in contemporary government policies. The state border is a kind of a symbol. It characterizes the extent to which a state is centralized, its stability and the effectiveness of its foreign policy. Territorial issues occupy a prominent place in mass consciousness. The perception of frontier as a political symbol and a factor influencing the country's behaviour on the global stage has become an element of national political cultures. In the paragraphs to follow we shall consider the attitudes to this issue in European and Russian political and cultural traditions as well as their impact on the development of trans-border processes in the Baltic Sea region.

In the European political culture, the frontier is viewed as a dividing borderline. Firstly, the European continent has been densely populated since the Middle Ages. No unoccupied or undeveloped territories are left to serve border areas. Secondly, long-term disunity of many European countries (e.g., Italy and Germany, the largest European countries, united not earlier than in the late XIX century, and the latter experienced the post-war division in the XX century) resulted in numerous principalities and small states that favoured distinctive borderlines.

Borderlines in Europe had a number of specific features. State frontiers between catholic and protestant countries used to be rather porous. Numerous cases were recorded when large groups of soldiers, officers, governmental officials and engineers left their countries to serve another monarch across the border. Cross-border trade and economic relations were vigorous in Europe. Nevertheless, the external border of the Western Christian world was of a different nature: it was well protected and difficult to cross. Jacques Le Goff, a prolific French historian, described medieval Western Christianity as "a closed world for the community that was able to incorporate some new members by force but excluded the others; in other words, it was characterized by inherent religious racism. A war among Christians was considered to be unacceptable but it turned into duty when waged against non-Christians" [5, p. 142].

Nowadays, in different historical conditions, the traditional perception of state frontiers in European political culture is still present: the borderlines between the EU countries are becoming more and more porous while the external line of this international unity is being constantly strengthened. However, it is worth mentioning that the aggravation of territorial and frontier problems in Europe has objective causes. "The break-up of the USSR, the reunification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and chaotic territorial separation in the Balkans placed Europe in the centre of conflicts and tension" [8, p. XI].

Another perception of frontier prevails in Russian political culture. It is, to a large extent, rooted in Russia's geopolitics and its historical experience. Russia has no borders which are naturally protected. It has land connection with all major regions and centres of Eurasia. Due to its strategic geographical location, Russia had to resist numerous invasions and wars. That is why, according to I. L. Prokhorenko, there is an exceptional attitude towards the notion of frontier in Russian political and cultural tradition. "A frontier is, in the first place, a defence line that protects our territory from alien cultures. It is not for nothing that 'foreign' in the Russian language is a synonym to 'trans-frontier' and 'trans-border'. The themes of 'boundless' and 'limitless' territories prevail in Russian epos as these words surreptitiously reflect the understanding of a free-of-enemies space where the frontier (edge) is infinitely far away as well as a foreign adversary» [7, p. 80].

At the present stage of international relations, the state frontier is a key issue in global and regional political processes for several reasons. Firstly, there still remain disputes over frontiers and border regions between sovereign states, for example, the Kuril Islands issue for Russia and Japan. Secondly, the current global integration processes lead to the so-called 'erosion' of borders caused by the establishment of customs unions and free trade areas aimed at ensuring sustainable economic and political cooperation. Thirdly, the state frontier is one of the key notions in a comprehensive understanding of regional political processes that include trans-border regional cooperation alongside regional integration processes.

The development of inner cross-border regions is a major stabilizing factor of domestic and foreign policy of any state. Regional cooperation facilitates political and economic ties between the neighbouring countries as well as integration processes in a region at large. Stemming from historical background and traditions, trans-border cooperation promotes the establishment and development of a network of international regional organizations that implement joint projects and programmes.

Trans-border regional cooperation can evolve into a common integration process that results in a large supranational integration cluster. A classic example of a "merger" of trans-border regional relations is the EU.

At an early stage of European integration, cooperation among the countries was developed in the framework of three large regional international organizations — the European Community for Coal and Steel, the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. In 1967 they formed the so-called European Communities [3]. Their regulations provided a basis for the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which resulted in the formation of the EU as a unified body. This example illustrates the importance of trans-border regional

cooperation for integration processes. It is worth mentioning that it has a cyclic character. Having emerged as a result of integration processes, a large unity has to establish ties with its neighbours. At the same time, cooperation within the unity — among its constituent parts — reaches a new level.

At present, after a number of enlargements, a crucial development factor for the EU is the establishment of trans-border regional cooperation with Russia. The Baltic Sea region can be viewed as the best platform in this respect. Firstly, since Finland joined the EU in 1995, the Russian-Finnish border has become a thousand-kilometre-length border between the EU and Russia. Therefore, the cooperation in the Baltic Sea region is an important element of a long-term mutually profitable partnership. Also, the EU enlargement in 2004 — the accession of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia — is another argument for the development of cooperation in this region.

Secondly, there is an energy factor that speaks for cooperation in this region. The EU is interested in Russia's energy exports without any intermediate countries involved, and this attaches special importance to trans-border cooperation. The construction of a sub-sea gas pipeline, the Nord Stream, is a compliance with geo-political interests of both parties.

At the present stage, cooperation between Russia and the EU in the Baltic Sea region remains a key element in the development of a mutual partnership. It can be illustrated by a number of joint programmes and projects carried out in the framework of the Northern Dimension policy, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), which was launched in 2007.

The European Neighbourhood Policy is an instrument for developing trans-border regional cooperation between the EU and the neighbouring countries. It is aimed at the establishment of "the ring of friendly countries" on the borders of the European Union [1] as well as facilitation of closer cooperation in politics, economy and culture. In its turn, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument is a key tool of providing financial assistance to the ENP member countries and Russia.

Currently, several integrated programmes and projects are implemented in the ENPI framework. They aim to strengthen cross-border cooperation between Russian and EU regions. The Cross-border Cooperation Programmes signed at the 2009 EU Russia Summit in Stockholm serve an example. These programmes are designed to enhance cross-border cooperation between Russia and the EU as well as to foster a mutually beneficial regional partnership on the whole.

The overall budget of all the programmes equals to 437 mln euros. They are financed from various sources — the European Commission (267 mln euros), the EU member countries (67 mln euros) and the Russian Federation (103.7 mln euros) [1]. The participants of the programmes are the regions in Northwest Russia (the Leningrad region, the Murmansk region, the Arkhangelsk region, the Kaliningrad region, the Komi Republic, the Republic of Karelia and St. Petersburg) and the EU members (Finland, Sweden and the Baltic states) [4].

The implementation of the programmes is based on the principle of mutually beneficial partnership and complementarity, i.e. these programmes should support larger sub-national projects in the strategic partnership be-

tween Russia and the EU. They also envisage the principle of equal representation, which means the establishment of a joint working group and a joint programme management body. It is noteworthy that trans-border regional cooperation, along with the implementation of joint programmes, provides an impetus for development of international regional organizations that contribute to strengthening international relations.

The Baltic Sea region is no exception as it hosts a number of international regional organizations aimed at enhancing cooperation between Russia and the EU (e. g. the Council of the Baltic Sea States).

Trans-border regional cooperation between Russia and the EU is maintained through the Euroregions — “cross-border international communities within trans-border cooperation of European countries in the sphere of economy, culture, education, transport and ecology ... based on the principle of subsidiarity” [2]. The examples are the Nieman Euroregion and the Baltic Euroregion, which include the Kaliningrad region, and the Karelia Euroregion.

In view of the above, the following conclusions are drawn:

First, a number of factors such as historical experience, geo-political location, national psychology and some other determine the notion of a frontier in a political culture. Perceptions of this notion in mass consciousness in different countries can vary. The state frontier is a key element of trans-border regional cooperation. Being a dividing line between sovereign countries, it is viewed as a factor that can be both negative and positive for the development of trans-border regional relations.

Second, trans-border regional cooperation is a major factor of regional integration processes which are vital for sustainable political and economic development of any country.

Third, trans-border cooperation between Russia and the EU provides a sound basis for the development of their strategic partnership. Trans-border cooperation in the Baltic Sea region in particular is the most effective means of achieving this goal.

Fourth, at the present stage of Russia—EU relations there are a number of cooperation mechanisms and programmes in the Baltic Sea region implemented in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, and the Northern Dimension.

The notion of a state frontier, which had developed over several centuries, differed in Russian and European political cultures to a large extent. However, nowadays these perceptions undergo a transformation process directed at integrating the two approaches. This process is taking place in the Baltic Sea region in conditions of the development of trans-border relations between Russia and the EU.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that in a long-term perspective the development of regional integration processes in the Baltic Sea region is a vital element of further strengthening a strategic partnership between Russia and the EU.

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